

PRESS RELEASE

Luxembourg, 25 June 2001

10234/01 (Presse 256)

**DECLARATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE OCCASION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL DAY IN SUPPORT OF VICTIMS OF TORTURE**

On the occasion of the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture (26 June), the European Union underlines the primary importance it attaches to the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in all parts of the world. Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are among the most abhorrent violations of human rights and human dignity. This day is an occasion to speak up against this scourge, to be mindful of those who suffer under it and to pay tribute to those who combat torture and help victims overcome the physical and psychological pain.

Fourteen years ago, on 26 June 1987, the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment came into force. Since then 124 States, have ratified the Convention. Yet, torture continues to occur and perpetrators continue to go unpunished, even in countries that have ratified the Convention. This underscores the need for more intensive and concerted action, at national, regional and international level, towards the goal of global eradication of torture. It is in this context that the European Union in April of this year adopted Guidelines for an EU Policy Towards Third Countries on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, thus confirming the issue at the centre-stage of the Union's human rights policy. The Guidelines provide an operational tool for the EU to intervene in cases of torture and step up efforts to further reinforce respect for international norms and standards.

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The European Union welcomes and supports the work done by the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE in the fight against torture. Co-operation by States with international mechanisms, such as the UN Special Rapporteur and the Committee Against Torture, is essential to make our international system of protection and promotion of human rights effective. The European Union supports the prompt adoption of an Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, that provides an independent and efficient international visiting mechanism for the prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The Union further actively supports the work of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. Through funding at the national and Community level, it also offers substantial support to organisations that provide medical, social, legal and other assistance to many men, women and children who are victims of torture with the aim of restoring their health and dignity as human beings.

The role played by human rights NGOs and human rights defenders deserves particular attention. They work selflessly, and often at great risk, to bring cases of torture to the attention of the international community and to assist those at risk of torture. The European Union is pleased with the contribution by the NGOs to make this day a living event. The dedicated involvement of many sectors such as civil society, including NGOs, professional engagement by lawyers, police, medical personnel and educators etc. as well as government action is required to find ways and means to combat torture.

We must all stand together to make the world free from torture.
